

VZCZCXRO7908

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAH #0520/01 1140641
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 240641Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2707
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2873
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5123
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2738
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3367
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3497
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000520

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS REFORM TO IMPLEMENT INTERNATIONAL
COMMITMENTS

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: On April 15, the director of the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights discussed Turkmenistan's efforts at human rights reform with Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher. During the abbreviated meeting, caused by the director's last minute scheduling conflict, she highlighted recent efforts by the government to comply with the country's international human rights commitments. While welcoming collaboration with partners to bring Turkmenistan's laws in conformity with global human rights norms, the choice of partners is restricted, and engagement with the Red Cross will not result in quick prison access. END SUMMARY.

NEW CONSTITUTION: BASIS FOR FURTHER REFORMS

13. (SBU) On April 15, the director of the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, Shirin Akmedova, discussed Turkmenistan's efforts at human rights reform with Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher. Boucher asked Akmedova to describe how recent changes to the Constitution and legislative reforms are being implemented. Akmedova explained that the constitutional changes establish three branches of government, expand citizens' rights, and provide the basis for further reform.

14. (SBU) Akmedova referred to the January 9 opening session of the Mejlis (Parliament), saying that President Berdimuhamedov used the occasion to emphasize Turkmenistan's priority of bringing its laws in conformity with international standards. In that light, she said the Mejlis would ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women during its upcoming session. This action responds to a recommendation made at the UN Human Rights Commission's Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan, and Akmedova noted that not all countries have undergone the review process. During 2009, Turkmenistan will submit reports under the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture. The reports will be prepared by an interagency commission established to oversee implementation of Turkmenistan's human rights obligations.

SCHOOL CURRICULA INCLUDE RIGHTS AWARENESS

15. (SBU) Regarding the constitutional guarantee of citizens' rights, Boucher asked whether there is a civic education program so that people can learn about their rights. Akmedova said all secondary schools and universities include a "rights" course in the curriculum. Students learn about the Constitution and fundamental rights and freedoms. The Institute promotes rights awareness among officials and ordinary citizens, often working in collaboration with international organizations. She said activities take place on a near weekly basis, citing the example of a meeting earlier that day with United Nations Development Program to plan election rights-related activities in connection with the July 2009 local elections. In other words, "the work continues without stopping." When Boucher asked if the Institute cooperates with NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, Akmedova replied that they cooperate only with groups that have local representatives, with the exception of two USAID implementing partners -- the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and Internews.

AKMEDOVA: THERE ARE NO POLITICAL PRISONERS

16. (SBU) Boucher asked whether there is any systematic way to review prison cases, and also about the prospects for prison visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Akmedova responded straightforwardly that prisoners had been detained, convicted and sentenced, and inasmuch as they had committed crimes, they are criminals. She said the Turkmenistan Criminal Code does not allow for the detention of political prisoners. Regarding Red Cross access to prisons, a meeting with the Red Cross last year resulted in a step-by-step process of engagement, beginning with activities to increase awareness among penitentiary officials. Training for Interior Ministry officials took place last year, and training

ASHGABAT 00000520 002 OF 002

continues this year for others. The second step involves access to prisons by the Red Cross.

17. (SBU) In response to Boucher's question about suggested areas for increased bilateral cooperation, Akmedova suggested education and research. The Institute is a research body and is already cooperating with USAID in areas like reform of the laws on religion, public organizations and media. Planned activities "will be pursued actively."

18. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher cleared this cable.

MILES